

# Donor Policies and Practices in Conducting Education Sector Studies in Developing Countries: A Review and Critique

Gary Anderson, Marie-Hélène Adrien, Charles Lusthaus

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## Abstract

This paper reviews the practices of 14 aid donors in conducting national education sector studies. It concludes that sector studies are conducted to guide donor investment, to assist educational improvement, and sometimes to assist developing countries to develop their capacities for policy research. These purposes in turn shape the methodology used: the composition of study teams, the role of the host government, the use of advisory committees, the nature of field visits, and the extent of donor coordination. The purpose of the study and values of the donor determine the audiences for the report and have major influence on its quality.

## Introduction

Education sector studies are regularly conducted to profile national education systems. Such studies are sponsored by ministries and research institutes in host countries, as well as by bilateral and multilateral donor agencies. Although donor studies in the education sector are numerous, little public information is available describing the policies and procedures used in conducting them, and there are no available critiques of their comparative approaches. These shortages are frequently explained by the methodological difficulties of gathering reports and profiles that often involve proprietary information protected by anonymous government officials dispersed throughout the globe.

Given the current economic and philosophical environment for development assistance, however, the scarcity of evaluations of donor practices in conducting sector studies is surprising. The budget constraints experienced by donor agencies have required more strategic expenditures of financial resources, while enhancing partnerships between North and South development communities has become an operative framework. The same concerns are reflected in the developing countries themselves as they struggle to improve the efficiency, effectiveness and societal context of schooling.

Clearly any understanding of successful practices in conducting sector studies ought to be widely shared throughout the development communities. Bilateral and multilateral agencies and organizations need to discuss process issues in order to improve their individual methodologies and ensure greater accuracy in the findings. Planners may ask themselves how, given their aims and priorities in providing development assistance, they can better use the sector study process to reach their goals. Consultants and academics may provide constructive feedback on the relationships between needs, methodology and results. And most important, the host officials in the developing country should understand how their involvement in the study process can increase their research capacities, while ensuring that their knowledge is shared and their priorities met.

Our paper addresses five significant questions:

- 1) Why are national education sector studies conducted?
- 2) Who is involved in generating them?
- 3) How are these studies produced?
- 4) Who are the major beneficiaries?
- 5) What are the results of the study process?

The configuration of answers to the questions reveals something about the development philosophy of the various donors. It should be noted that many of the donor policies referred to here are implicit rather than formalized. They are what Guba (1984) refers to as policy-in-intention, in which policy may be reflected in a strategy undertaken to solve or ameliorate a problem.

The article is written for researchers who share our interest in process issues in such studies, and for policy makers who may wish to consider donor practices from the perspective gained through comparative analysis. Our work relies on data collected from two sources. First, we have examined the findings of recent meta-evaluations conducted for the Canadian International Development Agency [CIDA] and for the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO]. In particular, the survey by Ruggles, Hughes and Anderson (1992), *A strategic approach to HRD planning for CIDA: A comparison of donor approaches to national human resource development studies*, has provided us with data from interviews conducted in 1990 and 1991 with representatives from six bilateral donor agencies, and eight multilateral banks and organizations, regarding the processes they follow in conducting sector studies.<sup>1</sup> Various sector studies are a second source of data, which we examined to see how methodology issues relate to findings. We have supplemented our own examinations with insights put forward by practitioners and theorists in the academic literature.

The paper deliberately avoids discussion of the frameworks used for, and the content of, these studies. Its other limitation is that the donor interviews date from 1990 and the national education sector studies on which the analysis is based were conducted in the five year period before that. Thus, the approaches used by specific donors may have changed, and being rooted in an earlier context, they can scarcely be expected to address issues implicit in current development thinking.

## Why Are National Education Sector Studies Conducted?

The objectives of the education sector studies tend to fall into three groupings: those connected to donor investment, those connected to educational improvement, and those that make a contribution to the development of policy research capacities. Just as the policy making to implementation process is a continuum of identifiable stages, the three groupings here are not mutually exclusive. Instead, the studies usually serve some number of aspects of international development assistance as conceived and structured by the donor agency.

### Donor Investment

There is a direct linkage between sector studies and programming donor assistance strategies for most bilateral donors and for the development banks. At CIDA, for instance, the national human resource development [HRD] study is connected to the programming strategy as outlined in the Country Policy Framework. There is a similar linkage between studies and strategies for the Japan International Cooperation Agency [JICA], the Swedish International Development Authority [SIDA], the British Overseas Development Administration [ODA] and the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation [NORAD]. The United States Agency for International Development [USAID] sector

studies, however, are not part of the formal process in developing their country strategies for development assistance. Instead, the studies provide supporting documentation for improved policy making and resource allocation.

Swedish SIDA uses sector studies to provide an overview for the identification of sub-sectors and projects for future SIDA support. It is SIDA's policy that sector studies be conducted before any major education program in a priority country can commence. Similarly, NORAD uses such studies in identifying sub-sectors for project support, although NORAD has conducted relatively few education sector studies itself, but has utilized the studies of other donors. The British ODA also uses its education sector studies to assist in project identification.

In the case of Japan, the Institute for International Cooperation within JICA prepares country studies, which outline the basic strategy for Japanese development assistance. Priorities for the development of human resources are contained in these reports, including the technical and vocational training needed in the public and private sectors. The main objective for conducting the sector studies and country report is to prepare a Japanese development assistance strategy for the country.

The linkage between sector studies and donor investment is less direct in the case of a few multilateral agencies such as UNESCO and the International Institute for Educational Planning [IIEP], largely because the information is intended primarily for more efficient and effective use of existing resources by the developing nation. UNESCO tries to help develop viable sector strategies to respond to financial constraints, crisis, or socio-economic change, and to make positive contributions to development-oriented restructuring. Beyond developing strategies, UNESCO's country sector studies serve as a framework for

mobilizing and coordinating external financing around long term priority objectives and projects.

Development banks such as the World Bank similarly use education sector studies to provide the basis for the dialogue between the bank and the host government on the principal issues that are to be resolved and the implications for future project lending. Although each task manager assigned the responsibility for conducting such a study has considerable flexibility in how it is implemented, in a broad sense the studies should help indicate where scarce resources are to be allocated, which may then contribute to working out future lending programs. The main objectives for Asian Development Bank [ADB] educational sector studies are to enable the Bank to learn more about the sector before investing and to identify appropriate areas for Bank involvement.

It should be acknowledged that when the purpose is to identify a donor investment strategy, the sector study will necessarily reflect the donor's values, policy priorities, and comparative advantages related to certain types of development assistance. CIDA, for instance, will assess the situation of women as it relates to the sector, while the German Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit [GTZ] will pay particular attention to technical education (Elyers & Sñlizer, 1992, pp. 9-11).

## **Educational Improvement**

It is not at all unusual for bilateral donors to conduct studies that direct their efforts in assisting development in the educational sector. However, the focus is primarily related to the donor's, as well as the host country's, investment interests. In contrast, for some multilateral agencies, such as UNESCO, the purpose of the sector studies is to assist member states in developing policies and strategies for their education system to meet national social and economic needs. For these

agencies, there is less of a focus on project identification. The national reports on education and training of the labour force prepared for the Directorate for Social Affairs, Manpower and Education of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], are intended to provide an overview of the arrangements and relative orders of magnitude of educational institutions, employers and trade unions in labour market training. These reports should clarify policy issues relevant to change. Similarly, the purpose of completing the International Bureau of Education [IBE] national reports on education is to provide all interested users of the IBE documentation centre with a summary of trends and developments in education in more than 90 countries.

The major difficulty in conducting studies aimed at educational improvement is that educational reform is a political process and unless the research effort is accompanied by political will, the results are likely to be disappointing. This illustrates the close relationship between the purpose of the study and its methodology.

### **Developing Capacities for Policy Research**

More rarely, education sector studies are used as development activities in their own right, reflecting an implicit belief that host countries must develop their own understandings of, and solutions to, the challenges facing them. In such cases, the process involves fostering indigenous research capacities for improved policy making and resource allocation. UNESCO, for example, attempts to enhance these capacities in order that developing countries are professionally and technically prepared to participate in the dialogue with external agencies, and that future studies are conducted by local experts. In a similar fashion, USAID sector studies that describe an education system, analyse its bottlenecks, and identify the strategies for their alleviation, also

serve as a means to assist national ministries with resource allocation issues. The majority of education sector studies, however, tend not to focus on capacity development issues as such. This is in sharp contrast with donor assumptions that institutional capacity to plan and administer investments in education is "critical" to their lasting impact (Verspoor, 1991).

UNESCO's perspective is almost unique in recognizing research capacity gaps as impediments to the viability and sustainability of the sector study process and results. Any policy thus aimed at overcoming these impediments would ultimately help develop local capacity to prepare and manage education sector change on a continuous basis. In one context, Samoff (1990) calls this "the eventual Africanization of the process of evaluating and reforming African education," which must include "the transfer of responsibility for these very studies-- specifying their content and orientation as well as conducting them--to African governments, educators, and other scholars" (p.7).

Yet supporting capacity development is more than simply recognizing that skills and responsibilities need to be transferred to the South so that countries can identify development problems and solve them. It is less a set of abilities than a process that enables people to enhance these abilities to develop and implement strategies for increased sustainable performance. For developing countries, the process involves increasing human capacity "to identify critical needs, negotiate appropriate assistance and manage the resources thus acquired" from donors (Haddad, 1990, p. 530). For external agencies, the capacity development framework accentuates the strategic linkages between various activities in the development process.

## Who is Involved in Generating Education Sector Studies?

Sector studies are conducted by individuals or, more commonly, by teams, in which case there is a team leader (who is usually not from the country being studied). These teams are formed in various ways and they are supported in a variety of patterns by embassies, host governments and advisory committees. In general, when the purpose is for donor investment, the process is donor controlled; when the purpose is educational improvement or the development of policy research capacities, the process is more collaborative.

### Team Composition

Issues of responsibility for overseeing the study, and the study team leadership and composition, involve the roles played by donor agency staff, the employment of local and outside consultants, and the participation of host country Ministry of Education personnel. At CIDA, the responsibility for overseeing the national HRD study rests with a project team made up of a bilateral desk officer (usually the Planning Officer) and an HRD/Education Specialist. The study team leader is usually a leading Canadian HRD consultant who is responsible for contracting other Canadian and local consultants, and for ensuring the preparation of a work plan (specifying the data collection instruments and interview protocols, and listing the key organizations to be contacted). Local consultants usually collect data, and often prepare background papers in such areas as women in development, teacher training, and primary, technical or adult education. Apart from JICA and British ODA, most other agencies do not require specialist papers, but instead rely on the local consultants to assist in the review and revision of the report. This may in part reflect the varying quality of the background papers.

The CIDA practice of contracting out the sector study work to outside consultants is followed by most bilateral donor agencies. The British ODA sector study team is normally made up of the ODA Education Adviser, and may include the geographical Desk Officer and an ODA Economist. The team sometimes includes consultants from outside the Administration. The Education Division of SIDA is responsible for overseeing the sector studies, and the team may include SIDA's Education staff as well as outside experts from Sweden's universities and private sector. A consultant may serve as team leader. JICA also relies on university-based specialists to conduct their studies. For a 1990 study of Indonesia's education sector, there were five professors and an expert in educational administration from the Japanese Ministry of Education [MOE] on the team.

The Washington office of USAID normally contracts out the sector study and does not supply a staff member to participate in the study team (although they are involved in setting the scope of the work). Often a consortium of contractors identifies the individuals, within or outside the consortium, who will carry out the study. It is difficult to generalize about the make up of the USAID "core team," as it depends on the special circumstances of the country and the focus of the educational reform. In past sector studies, the team has included an educational planner, a specialist in primary education and curriculum, a specialist in vocational and technical education, and an anthropologist or sociologist.

USDAID works closely with the Ministry of Education in the developing country and it is usually the Ministry which nominates the counterpart team members. Most of these would be MOE staff although some may also come from the universities or research institutes. Similarly, British ODA and SIDA both typically arrange for Ministry staff to participate on the study team, as do UNESCO

and the World Bank. While CIDA does not normally involve Ministry staff on the local team, there is a growing commitment within CIDA to increasing the involvement of local authorities in general.

## Host Government Role

The role the host government is asked to play in sector studies varies according to the thinking of donor agencies. Both CIDA and NORAD currently view the study report as an internal agency document, which means that the formal participation of the Ministry of Education in the study is somewhat limited. CIDA may consult with Ministry staff on development priorities and plans, however, while NORAD may be provided with some Ministry resource people. The reticence on CIDA's part may result from a desire to avoid raising expectations in countries where the Agency may not be able to pursue its development assistance plans for the sector.

Most other bilateral donors do seek the active participation of the host government. The Ministry of Education is normally designated as the official counterpart for the study, and is asked to supply local staff members to assist in its preparation. Ministries often approve the terms of reference of the study, its methodology and scope, and review report drafts as they are produced. Iredale (1990) points out that the Ministry often knows "the intentions of a whole range of education donors...[and may] privately combine their different offerings to achieve its own particular aims" (p. 164). Such adroitness may develop in response to competition among host government departments for the limited funds available from the Finance Ministry. In British ODA studies, then, Finance officials may be included on the team to secure sufficient local resources for a development project (although in Iredale's experience host partners frequently contribute more in capital and recurrent terms than the donor).

Host governments participate in multilateral agencies' studies in ways comparable to their roles described here. In ADB studies, for instance, the host Ministry of Education and the central ministries of planning and finance generally provide facilities and support services, and comment on the terms of reference, and the interim and draft final report. The MOE may also suggest the names of local consultants to the international consultant who heads the study team, although the suggestions are not binding.

Some agencies view the active participation of local ministries as consistent with their aim of developing indigenous research capacity so that future sector studies can increasingly be done by local experts. As stated above, UNESCO's objective is to help build local capacity to prepare and manage sector change on a continuous basis. Similarly, UNESCO institutes such as the IIEP and the International Bureau of Education [IBE] work closely with host governments in order to develop the skills and knowledge base among researchers. The IIEP holds workshops with the national team members during key stages of the project including study design, testing of instruments, analysis of data, and the drafting of the report. Local counterparts are often asked to prepare specific chapters. The IBE plays a coaching role for host governments, by preparing guidelines for writing the national report, and by emphasizing a sound analysis of educational systems and areas of potential donor cooperation.

The active participation of the MOE can also facilitate the process of achieving consensus on the problem areas within the sector, and on recommended strategies for addressing them. In some cases, the Ministry participates in a project advisory committee along with representatives from central government agencies and key educational institutes. Such an approach encourages Ministry commitment to both the analysis and the

recommendations, and may avoid having the report viewed as the work of "outsiders."

## Advisory Committees

Questions about the relative merit of employing an advisory or steering committee to facilitate education sector studies relate to issues of capacity development, report quality, and the acceptance and dissemination of its findings. Through advisory committees, the host government bodies most responsible for planning and implementing educational change may participate more fully in the study process. As a result, they should develop their capacities not only to conduct education research, but more generally to learn strategies for increased performance within the sector. Advisory committees may also facilitate access to key government officials and documents, and guarantee that the study remains on a course most relevant to its stakeholders. Such committees also "help create enough ownership among the stakeholders...to ensure that results of the study are used" (Majchrzak, 1984, p.53). Advisory group members are often actively supportive in disseminating the study results.

At present, most bilateral agencies do not establish an advisory committee of local representatives to help direct or facilitate their education studies. Among the agencies interviewed here, only USAID makes frequent use of them, while CIDA, NORAD, JICA and British ODA do not. Swedish SIDA may use an informal advisory committee of a legal expert, and sector and country specialists, although the group will be based in Stockholm.

Besides USAID, UNESCO and the World Bank often employ formal advisory and steering committees of representatives from the education, planning and finance ministries, and from key educational or training institutes. Where such structures are not formally established, the World Bank normally solicits the input of various ministries on an informal

basis. For the United Nations Industrial Development Organization [UNIDO] studies, the national committee in the developing country usually acts in an advisory capacity by reviewing the terms of reference as well as the report. It is normally made up of representatives of both industry and government.

As good communication between all players is important, key central agencies need to participate in the study in meaningful ways, both to accommodate their views and to ensure their cooperation during the implementation process. Ministries of Education, for example, need to communicate with the heads of the key local educational institutions concerning the objectives and desired outcomes of the study. Advisory committees not only allow this information to be shared among stakeholders, but they provide conflicting interests with a forum for voicing concerns and conciliating differences. Stakeholder involvement in such structures allow those potentially most affected by the study to communicate with the study team conducting it (Lawrence, 1989).

## How Are These Studies Produced?

Most education sector studies follow donor guidelines which specify the content and procedures. They tend to have earmarked budgets and combine research and planning at the donor agency with fieldwork during country visits. In some cases they benefit from coordination with the work of other donors.

## Budget and Country Visits

The size of the budget for sector studies depends to a large extent on who conducts the work and the data required. Generally speaking, the more donors rely on in-house Agency staff and host Ministry personnel, the smaller their budgets, as no fees are required for consultants. The budgets for CIDA sector

studies range from \$50,000 for a recent Jamaican study to more than \$100,000 for similar studies in Pakistan and the Philippines. The budget for British ODA produced studies, by contrast, is relatively nominal, since the main costs are travel and expenses for an ODA team to spend two weeks in the field. The local Ministry provides their staff members at no expense to PDA, as their contribution to the study.

Some of the larger studies produced by the World Bank, ADB, UNESCO and USAID could have budgets as high as \$450,000. For the World Bank the budget is based on the planned number of staff weeks to complete the study. A small study in Belize in 1989 required only 16 weeks of work, including three people in the field for a two week period. A 1988 Philippines study, on the other hand, took 75 weeks of work, a Pakistan study 90 weeks, and a comparable Indonesia study over 100. The trend is toward larger studies, as the ten week "mini-study" is becoming increasingly uncommon.

## Donor Coordination

Considering the substantial costs of producing education sector studies, it is reasonable to assume that donor agencies attempt to coordinate their efforts so that work is not duplicated. In general, a step is taken toward achieving cost effectiveness in such studies when the information produced either differs from, or broadens, previous work (Chelimsky, 1983). CIDA tries to ensure coordination by having its lead consultant meet with World Bank staff in Washington prior to embarking on a field mission, or by asking the consultants to peruse the sector studies produced by other donors and meet with donor staff in the developing country. While in theory this allows those conducting sub-studies to plan their work with previous investigations in mind, in practice the CIDA project team is not always familiar with earlier reports prior to writing the project terms of reference. The

terms of reference are typically drawn up requiring consultants to review previous studies, rather than in response to them.

Other donors employ other informal methods to avoid duplication in sector studies. The JICA overseas office contacts the local offices of the World Bank, the United Nations Development Program [UNDP], USAID and GTZ, and in some cases may organize a joint meeting of donors to discuss the proposed sector study. For British ODA, the education advisor and the economist use World Bank studies, where available, and conduct small discrete studies for which there is missing information. Swedish SIDA has an informal consultation process between their local office and the Ministry of Education to identify other donor studies, and in recent years SIDA has participated in sectoral work commissioned by the World Bank and UNESCO. Similarly, the World Bank has no formal process to ensure donor coordination and familiarity with other sector studies, although the Bank task manager is expected to be familiar with all the major studies relevant to the work. The Bank has cooperated with other donors to produce sector studies, including the 1989 review of Belize done with British ODA.

USAID also attempts to avoid overlap in the timing of donor studies. Field missions check to see what work the major bilateral and multilateral agencies are planning to do (not just what they have done) and in some cases will organize a round-table of donors in order to coordinate their studies. Despite such efforts, there remains considerable overlap in the work being conducted. Within a three year period, 1987-90, the education sector in Pakistan was the focus of six major studies: by NORAD, the World Bank, British ODA, CIDA, IBE, and USAID, which worked closely with both the World Bank and ABD in conducting the study. Education and HRD in Indonesia also drew the attention of CIDA in 1984 USAID in 1986, and both ADB and the World Bank a few years later.



Given the existence in some cases of descriptive material, statistical overviews and previous analytical studies, any failure to utilize this work may reflect the methodological frameworks for sector studies more than a lack of will or coordinating structures. In the case of Canada, the evolution of aid policy, terminology, and thinking about the meaning of development, continues to reflect policies and philosophies associated with the World Bank (Mundy, 1992). For the Bank, the standard issues in sector analysis remain: efficiency in the use of resources, resource allocation, equity in the provision of education, and financing educational investment (Mingat & Tan, 1988). To the extent that this framework has been adopted by other agencies, questions may be raised about the relationships between the focus of the sector study, the types and sources of data, and the use (or non-use) of previous work.

While each agency may wish to adopt an aid strategy related to the education and training needs of the developing country, and to the experience and capacity of the donor, coordinating efforts is preferable to working in isolation. This includes working more closely with relevant ministries in the South, which often bring to the enterprise a "superior understanding of important contextual and policy factors" (Binnendijk, 1989, p. 219). Uncoordinated efforts place excessive demands on ministries to produce system data for individual donors. To date, relatively few studies have been products of joint donor efforts, although the World Bank has produced joint initiatives with UNESCO, GTZ, ODA, USAID and other donors.

## Who are the Major Beneficiaries?

It is possible to talk of primary and secondary target audiences as beneficiaries of education studies. While primary audiences typically include members of the donor agency and host

ministry officials, the extent to which the findings of the study reports are disseminated to publics-at-large involve issues of security classification. Beyond target audiences, the beneficiaries of the sector studies may be understood in terms of whose values inform the work and who participates in the study process.

## Primary Audiences

The primary audience relates to the purpose of the study. Within CIDA, for example, this audience is the bilateral programming staff who commission such studies, and the HRD/education specialists who are responsible for providing the bilateral branch with advice on an HRD programming strategy as part of the Country Policy Framework. The programming staff in the Canadian Partnership Branch, which supports initiatives of Canada's private sector and non-governmental organization community, could be another primary audience, particularly if the interest is to facilitate integrated country programming. Whether or not the host country receives the report varies situationally, but the normal pattern is to treat such studies as internal CIDA documents. (NORAD and JICA also do not include their Southern partners among the primary audiences of their sector reports.)

In the case of other bilateral donors such as British ODA, SIDA, and USAID, the primary audiences include their own organizations as well as the host Ministry of Education and such central agencies as Planning and Finance. The SIDA report, for example, must be approved by its Education Division and field office as well as by the Ministry. USAID sector studies are written less to provide new project ideas to Agency staff, than to assist the MOE in policy making and resource allocation. USAID, then, works closely with the Ministry at all stages in the study, as most of the sector work is done through contracting out by the USAID field mission.

Multilateral agencies such as UNESCO, UNIDO, and IIEP, and development banks such as the ABD and the World Bank, also prepare their sector study reports with a wider primary audience in mind. For UNIDO the target audience includes host government officials and the personnel engaged in industry at the technical and managerial levels. As IIEP studies are intended to identify policy and planning implications for the developing country, the research findings are organized so that they can be easily utilized by the country's decision makers for planning education. The principal audience of both ADB and World Bank sector reports are senior officials in the line ministry of education and in the financial and planning agencies, as well as bank staff. The host government must agree with the recommendations in the World Bank studies, as these could be linked to a future loan program.

### **Dissemination to Secondary Audiences**

The dissemination of findings to secondary audiences involves issues of security classification. In order to make the reports available to a wider range of readers, the development banks follow similar practices. One involves preparing a detailed summary of the study (which unsummarized is often cumbersome and may contain sensitive information) in order to increase its circulation. The ABD, for instance, is considering publishing a 50-page overview for non-stakeholders. At present, the Bank seeks permission from the host government to circulate its reports to other donors and to interested educational institutions.

The sector study reports written by the World Bank follow an elaborate colour-coding system that designates their security classification. The Bank task manager first prepares the report in "white cover" to be reviewed by the mission team. It is then submitted to the supervisor at the Bank of the task manager and

is reviewed by other Bank staff within the same department. The revised report is then circulated in "yellow cover" for a review by Bank staff in other departments. When the chief economist for the region signs off the sector report, it is approved for distribution to the host government and circulated in "green cover". The Bank then sends a mission to discuss the report with the host government. Following further revisions, the host government approves the report, and it is sent in "grey cover" to the Board of the World Bank. If the study is particularly interesting (and discusses some general policy issues), the report is released in "red cover" which entitles access by the general public through the World Bank bookstore and subscription service.

### **Values and Participation**

A central policy issue concerns the values which underlie the sector studies. In the main, the work appears to reflect the values of the donor more than host communities, in so far as the objectives of the studies are determined by donors, the methodologies reflect their capacities, and the special areas of focus represent their own assumptions and cultural priorities. Beyond the obvious point that donors benefit here in ways that hosts do not, such action contradicts the principles of partnership and ownership among the various stakeholders. Although key informant interviews may serve as means of policy dialogue as well as data collection, the dialogue (like the study itself) ultimately reflects the comparative advantages of the donor. What exactly are the ethical issues raised by these displays of donor values guiding needs analysis?

In contrast to agencies whose objectives are linked solely to donor investment, UNESCO conducts sector studies to assist member states in developing policies and strategies for their education system to meet national social and economic needs. They are also concerned

with fostering professional development among local planners and researchers. To the extent that viable plans and management capacities are developed, the practice represents one area where donor and host values coincide.

Other methodological practices are less sustainable, however, and tend to reflect donor thinking more than host priorities. Samoff (1990) writes that "there is little attention to the sorts of goals set by African governments and educators" (p.7) in the sample of studies he reviewed. Instead the concerns are with impact, efficiency, effectiveness, and quality of education, with institution building and educational finance, and with possible responses within the sector to the African economic crisis. In part, these concerns reflect the "common starting points" of the studies; namely, they "have all been commissioned by agencies formally charged to assist educational development in Africa by intervening in the decision making and policy implementation processes and by granting and lending funds for that purpose" (Samoff, 1990, p.4). Beyond the similar role donors are to play in educational development, the studies manifest "a broadly shared sense of what is wrong with African education and how it ought to be restructured...[which] suggests either a surprising theoretical convergence or a powerfully influential unifying impulse" (Samoff, 1990, p.6).

Aspects of this "broadly shared sense" of the priorities in educational development underscore the complexities involved in understanding who is benefiting from the studies. Samoff (1990) points out that most studies assert an increased role for the private sector in education. While consistent with adjustment policies for reducing the size of public expenditures in indebted nations, the private sector is often positioned to provide for its own training needs, or respond quickly to market demands. More poignantly, CIDA's emphasis on women's participation in

development projects reflects the mainstream of Canadian values as well as the aspirations of women overseas. Although such priorities represent a union of sound developmental practices and widely-shared cultural values, they do not leave "the local ministry of education entirely free to pursue its own internal domestic interests" (Iredale, 1990, p. 166).

## What are the Results of the Sector Study Process?

The results of the study process may be seen as operational lessons learned by donors about the work, and in the ways they try to ensure quality in reports. Just as the effect of the studies should be considered in relation to their purposes, and in terms of their desired impacts on educational planning and practices, the study process lasts from initial planning to final report and may be scrutinized within these parameters.

## Lessons Learned by Donors

The lessons compiled by the donors in the Ruggles, Hughes and Anderson interviews underscore the importance of planning and process issues, local participation, and making the findings available to a wider audience. Host countries need adequate time and suitable mechanisms for identifying and conveying education and development priorities. Key central agencies such as ministries of education, planning and finance need to participate in meaningful ways, both to accommodate their concerns and to ensure their cooperation during the implementation process. Consensus needs to be reached between the host government and donor on the terms of reference. Studies should focus on sub-sectors rather than global issues, and better donor coordination would help avoid duplication while reducing demand on limited local resources.

Active local participation in the studies begins with planning the scope of the work, and continues with the use of indigenous researchers in data collection and analysis. Donors need to allow sufficient time for local participation by recognizing that arranging logistical support may be problematic and time-consuming, and should be managed through local offices. Host experts and stakeholders should also be used to assess the relevant academic research conducted by local universities, and to review the draft documents.

Donors also found that the information in sector study reports would be made more accessible by providing a concise overview of the issues and recommendations while leaving most of the descriptive and statistical material to technical appendices. Finished reports also need to be made available to other donors and academic communities to improve long-term quality of studies through critical reviews.

## Quality of Reports

All development organizations try to ensure quality in sector study reports through various means. Foremost among them is the formal review and approval process, which may or may not extend beyond agency personnel. The CIDA study reports are reviewed by the bilateral desk officer, the education sectoral specialist, and by CIDA staff in the Canadian embassy. NORAD and SIDA reports are reviewed by their field offices and by their respective education divisions in Oslo and Stockholm. The JICA review process includes sending the study team to the developing country to explain the draft report to the host officials, whose comments inform further revisions.

The quality of the reports produced by the World Bank, the ADB, UNESCO and USAID is enhanced by having both an extensive peer review, and a review by relevant ministries in the developing country. The ADB reports, for

example, are distributed internally to the Bank's policy, program, economics and education divisions, and externally to chosen host ministries. For each ADB study there is usually an Inception Report, Interim Report, Draft Final Report, and Final Report. USAID reports also go through various levels of review by the team, the U.S. field mission, the host government, and the USAID office in Washington. There is the added benefit of receiving constructive comments from other donors and from informed academics when the study is released as a public document.

The review process ensures that findings are scrutinized for errors and inconsistencies. Data may be triangulated and the analysis reviewed. While agencies try to ensure methodological rigour and consistency by publishing sector assessment manuals (see Mingat & Tan, 1988; Pigozzi & Cieutat, 1988), they also emphasize quality in their study personnel. Like all agencies, CIDA tries to use the best available people to conduct its research, recruiting senior "trusted" consultants for the study team.

## Conclusion

The process issues dealt with in our paper line up according to the purposes for conducting education sector studies. That is to say, methodologies remain consistent with the aims and objectives of the work. When, for example, the purpose is related to donor investment, the study process is largely donor-driven; when it includes developing indigenous research capacities, the process is more collaborative.

This statement has implications for development agencies and development communities. What is required for effective donor-driven studies is a sound understanding of the donor environment: its policy context and value systems, its comparative advantages and capacities, and its organizational culture, philosophy and ability to learn. This

environment acts as a filter through which the education sector of a developing country is viewed. A donor study that feeds information into policy mechanisms for guiding investment has as its principal stakeholder the donor itself. Yet such a study process appears at odds with mainstream development thinking, which emphasizes partnership, policy dialogue, and stakeholder ownership of the development process.

By contrast, the study process is a development activity in its own right when it builds indigenous research capacity for self-sustained learning in policy and educational development. Here the study is valued both as a process and for the information it generates about the sector. What is required for successful collaboration among stakeholders is the effective use of such structures as advisory committees, workshops, round-tables, and report planning and review sessions. How the discrete activities form a single, capacity-building process is analogous to understanding development itself, which in its scope is a book-length study.

Sector studies that have educational improvement as a primary purpose link the results of the study with better practices in the sector. In this case the assumption is that the knowledge generated by the review can be applied in the system, and that improvement can follow. The validity of the assumption, however, remains largely unproven. What is required for increased understanding of the impact of sector studies on educational systems is a wider dissemination of findings, and the designation of a research agency as a repository for sector study reports.

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The primary sources of data for the Ruggles, Hughes and Anderson (1992) survey include the following multilateral agencies and development banks: the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], the United Nations Industrial Development Organization [UNIDO], the International Institute for Educational Planning [IIEP], the International Bureau of Education [IBE], the UNESCO Institute of Education, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], the Asian Development Bank [ADB], and the World Bank. In addition, the following bilateral donor agencies were interviewed: the United States Agency for International Development [US AID], the British Overseas Development Administration [ODA], the Swedish International Development Authority [SIDA], the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation [NORAD], and the Japan International Cooperation Agency [JICA]. The survey also provides extensive data about CIDA practices, based primarily on their authority as Agency personnel (in the cases of Ruggles and Hughes) and as an education consultant working for CIDA (in the case of Anderson). This information is supplemented with documents that outline the organization of CIDA sector studies.